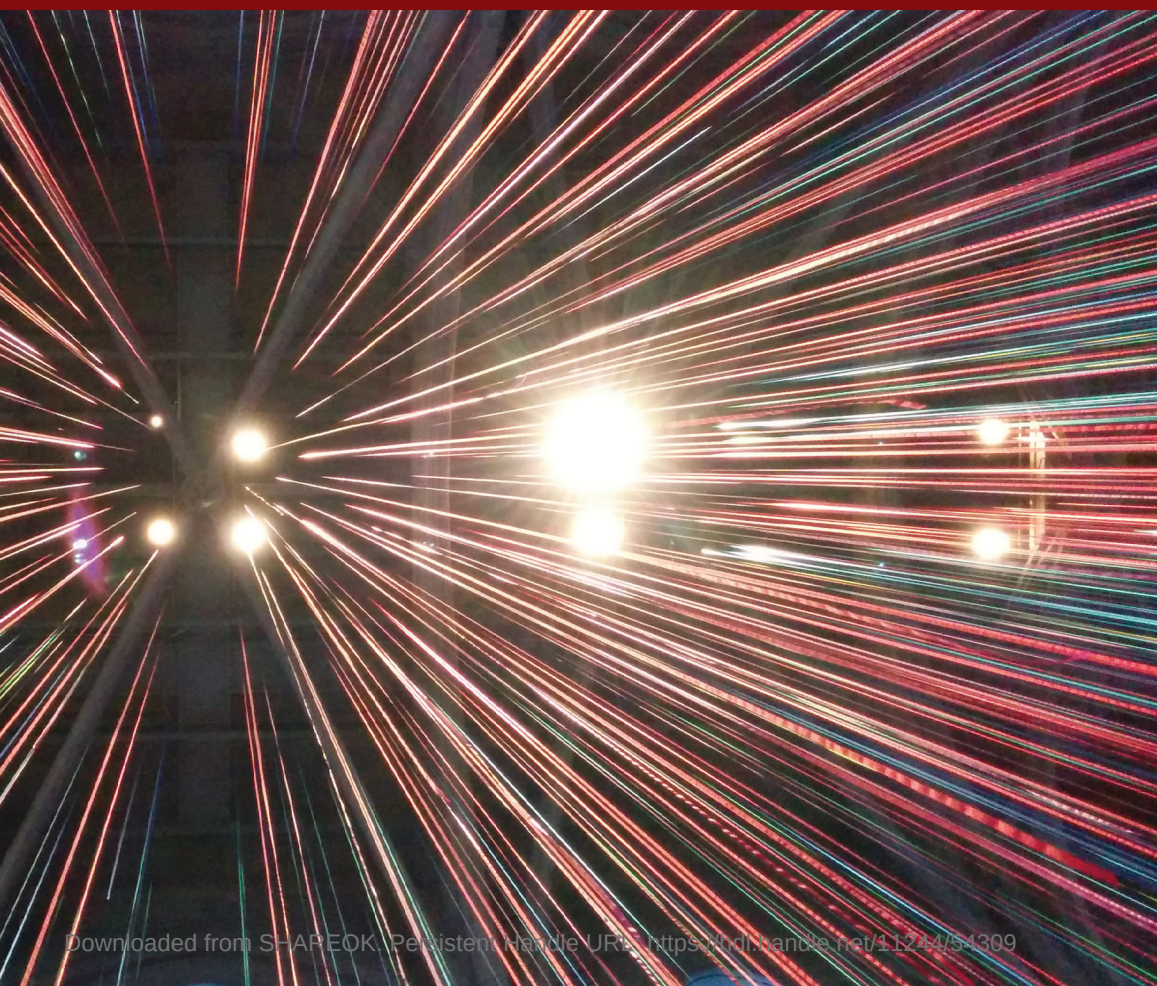
Research in the Archival Multiverse

Edited by Anne J Gilliland, Sue McKemmish and Andrew J Lau



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Chapter 11

RACE AND CULTURE

An Ethnic Studies Approach to Archival and Recordkeeping Research in the United States

Kelvin L. White

Abstract: This paper focuses on conceptual frameworks developed in ethnic studies and contemplates what these might contribute in terms of approaching archival and recordkeeping research through an African American lens. The paper explores the epistemological lineage of ethnic studies, its emergence and evolution in the US context; defines and discusses key concepts and contexts salient to ethnic studies, including cultural environments; and comments on the relationships between ethnic studies ideas and those drawn from both traditional and postmodern archival thinking. Lastly, the paper discusses some of the considerations in using conceptual frameworks from ethnic studies in research related to archival practice and recordkeeping in the United States.

> … no partial aspect of social life and no isolated phenomenon may be comprehended unless it is related to the historical whole, to the social structure conceived as global entity.[1]

Introduction: Of Culture, Race and Racism

One case that has been frequently used to illustrate the complexities of racial identity in the United States is that of Susie Guillory Phipps.[2] Phipps was

1 Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p.12.

2 See, for example, Frances Frank Marcus, "Louisiana Repeals Black Blood Law," New York Times (July 5, 1983), http://www.mixedracestudies.org/wordpress/?tag=susie-

born in 1934 and grew up on a farm in Acadia Parish, Louisiana. As a teenager, she eventually left home, married, and started a family. By 1977 she had married her second husband, Andy Phipps, who was known as an affluent shrimper and owner of a wholesale shrimping company. One day in 1977, Susie Phipps needed a copy of her birth certificate in order to apply for her passport. When she arrived at the Division of Vital Records in New Orleans, the clerk approached Phipps about an apparent discrepancy. Phipps had always identified herself and her family as being white. The clerk summoned Phipps into her office to show Phipps that she was the daughter of two black parents and that according to Louisiana law at the time of her birth, she was, in fact, black ("coloured" was the description used back then). According to various print sources, Phipps reportedly responded that she was in shock and "… was sick for three days."[3] Phipps consulted with state officials to have her birth certificate changed because, according to her, the racial categorisation stated on the birth record was an obvious mistake since she had been raised and lived as a "white" woman, had given birth to several "white" children, married two white men, and most significantly, she looked white. State officials informed her that while there are laws and regulations that (with the appropriate documentation) allowed someone to annotate name changes and spellings, correct birth dates, change and/or add a parent's name, and change gender designation, there were no stipulations for changing one's race on the birth certificate unless the individual could provide evidence to the state that left no doubt that the record had been tampered with, changed, or contained erroneous information.

Phipps insisted that her racial designation shown in the birth record was a mistake. Five year later she filed a lawsuit to change the designation primarily because, despite what the record indicated, she did not identify as a black woman. After a trial involving considerable publicity and personal expense (roughly US$40,000 in research and legal fees), the courts ruled in favour of the state. Louisiana law had historically defined a black person as one who had any traceable amount of black ancestors. In 1970 (after Jim

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guillory-phipps; Michael Omi, "Racial Identity and the State: The Dilemmas of Classification," *Law & Inequality* XV no.1 (Winter 1997); Rachel E. Moran and Devon W. Carbado. *Race Law Stories*. Foundation Press, 2008; Jonathan Tilove discusses the case in the context of the Ramapough Mountain People of New Jersey, and their claims for federal recognition as a Native American tribe although they had long been described as predominantly black people of mixed race: "Of Susan Guillory Phipps and Chief Redbone: The Mutability of Race," (July 9, 1992), Newhouse News service, http://jonathantilove.com/mutability-of-race/.

3 Calvin Trillin, "American Chronicles: Black or White," *New Yorker,* April 14, 1986, p.62.

Crow[4]) the law was changed and in effect, quantifiably defined a black person as anyone with 1/32 or more of black ancestry. State officials argued that there was no evidence that Phipps' records had been either tampered with or changed and that the state had not violated the law. In fact, the state demonstrated that she was 5/32 black by researching her family's birth and marriage certificates, ecclesiastical records and other historical documents such as slave inventories dating as far back as the 18th century. These records indicated that both of her parents were black (albeit light-skinned) and that her great-great-great-great grandmother, Margarita, was a slave of a French landowner's wife. After his wife had died, the latter had fathered children with Margarita. Moreover, the state informed Phipps that her first husband was also a black man. In the end, Phipps' birth certificate was not changed. She appealed to the Louisiana Supreme Court, but the court refused to hear her case. According to the State Health Department lawyer who represented the state of Louisiana in the case:

> Mrs. Phipps had lost her case against the state because most of the older records attesting her racial background and other evidence indicating race had corroborated the information on her birth certificate, placed there by a midwife.

He said publicity generated by the case had brought "a surge" of requests from applicants wishing to change the description of their race on old birth records. In 1980, he said, the state stopped mentioning race on birth records except in the state's confidential files, kept for statistical purposes.[5]

Louisiana subsequently repealed the law, replacing it with legislation requiring a "preponderance of evidence" to change racial designation on birth records, although without specifying how factors such as self-identity, lived experience, appearance or personal/family documentation might be weighed against the designations contained in accumulated official documentation of different generations of family members.

If race is merely a social construct that has no real meaning, as some scholars suggest, then why did Phipps *insist* that she was a white woman?[6]

---

4 The phrase "Jim Crow" refers to the segregation laws enacted in former US Confederate States (i.e., "the South") after Reconstruction (1877). These laws, while primarily targeted at African Americans, mandated racial segregation in public places between whites and non-whites from 1877 until 1965. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 overruled Jim Crow laws.

5 Marcus, "Louisiana Repeals Black Blood Law."

6 For more detailed discussion on the meanings of race, see Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture.* New York: Oxford University

Why did she spend nearly US$40,000 (equivalent to nearly US$150,000 in today's economy) to disprove her legal blackness? Would she have responded in the same way if her birth certificate showed that she was a descendant of white European immigrants? Obviously, she was bothered by the revelation and wanted the legal and historical record to reflect her lived experiences. Phipps' example is one that illustrates both ends of the spectrum when defining race. At one end of the spectrum is the essentialist formulation. It suggests that race is something that is fixed – just as certain physiological aspects of the body or the official record, themselves often used to establish not only race but also gender, are considered by certain schools of thought to be fixed rather than flexible or constantly "becoming."[7] On the other end, it demonstrates that race is not merely a social construct or an illusion that should be void of meaning and might beneficially be eliminated. Rather, it illustrates the reality of race – it exists and it matters! It also illustrates how records can become tools that can construct an official identity that might be quite different from that of one's personal or self-identity. Moreover, that official identity can trump personal or self-identity in legal or official contexts and there can be important legal and bureaucratic as well as affective consequences for the individuals in question if their juridical and personal identities fail to match up.

There are other archival and recordkeeping implications of Phipps' ordeal. First, there is the issue of power. Specific communities construct and use records to produce social power in order to increase their ability to influence others for personal advantage. In Phipps' case, a racist society defined and recorded blackness in ways that depicted it as inferior to whiteness.

Press, 1992; and Cornel West, *Race Matters*, Boston: Beacon Press, 2001.

7 Much recent critical work in race, ethnicity, gender and archival studies rejects such claims of fixity as they relate to the nature and pluralisation of the record as well as the rigidity of traditional physiological categorisations and binaries, e.g., of gender. See, for example, Dean Spade, *Normal Life*: *Administrative Violence, Critical trans Politics, and the Limits of the Law*. Brooklyn, NY: South End Press, 2011. Similarly, records continuum theorists such as McKemmish argue that rather than becoming intellectually and physically fixed when they cross the archival threshhold and are entered into the archival bond, records continuously take on new meanings as they move across space, time and all the different contexts in which they are situated or perform. See Sue McKemmish, "Are Records Ever Actual," in Sue McKemmish and Michael Piggott, eds. *The Records Continuum: Ian Maclean and Australian Archives: The First Fifty Years.* Clayton: Ancora Press in association with Australian Archives, 1994, pp.187-203, http://www.infotech.monash.edu.au/research/groups/rcrg/publications/smcktrc.html. For an exposition of classic ideas on the nature of the record, archives, and the archival bond, see Luciana Duranti, "The Archival Bond," *Archives and Museum Informatics* 11 nos.3-4 (1997): 213-218 and "Archives as a Place," *Archives & Manuscripts* 24 no.2 (1996): 242-255.

This stigma became fixed and immutable through highly interdependent recordkeeping and legal structures despite Phipps' lived experience. Second, there is the issue of ideology, which includes control over how people know and what they know. Dominant groups demonstrate the power of their ideas when they materialise them or make physical objects such as records that then serve to reinforce all sorts of power differentials that are also tied up in race and ethnicity issues. These records and their effects can be located not only in archives but also in other public spheres such as mass media, law, economics and education. Third, Phipps' case begs many questions about the very nature of archives as classically understood. How is the archive defined and by whom? More specifically, who and what shaped or influenced the concepts of the archive and archives as we understand them today, and for what purposes? More generally, how do societal norms (culture) influence recordkeeping activities and regulations? What was the purpose of keeping records on race in the United States and how were these records used apart from documenting a birth, marriage, or death? Whose values are reflected in the official record? How are subjugated groups described in the record? Who, if anyone is allowed to "correct" the record in an attempt to "set it straight" so that it reflect the realities of what actually happened and responds to the "right" values? Who developed and established the "rules" pertaining to such decisions, and for what purposes? Who or what provides meaning and assigns values to records when it comes to deciding their long-term fate?

The Phipps case reminds us that the concepts of race and ethnicity are, at best, messy. Historically, race has been bureaucratically and physiologically defined by categorising groups of people according to physical traits that might result from their genetic ancestry such as skin colour, body shape, facial features, hair texture, and so forth. These, as well as other social and political constructions of race, can also draw upon meanings and characteristics (perceived or otherwise) associated with particular races and racial stereotypes.[8] For example, African Americans are often associated with an overall lack of intelligence; Native Americans are depicted as loyal sidekicks or aggressive alcoholics; and stereotypes of Asian Americans suggest a group that is passive and politically inactive. Well into the twentieth

8 For examples and explanations of how race and racism developed in a Latin American context, see Peter Wade, *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America.* Chicago: Pluto Press, 1997, and *Blackness and Race Mixture: The Dynamics of Racial Identity in Colombia*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993; and Edward E. Telles, "Racial Ambiguity among the Brazilian Population," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 25 (1998): 415; and *Race in Another America: The Significance of Skin Color in Brazil.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004.

century, negative traits were believed to be passed on genetically and this belief was the primary basis of the Eugenics Movement (discussed later in the chapter), which aimed to reduce the reproduction of groups having less desirable traits. Racial paradigms and categorisations are also significant because they can be the basis of pejorative stereotypes between racial groups. By contrast, ethnicity is traditionally viewed in terms of a population of people who identify with each other on the basis of race.[9] At the risk of over-simplification, the significance of ethnicity lies in shared cultures and group history.[10]

The aim of this chapter is to discuss conceptual frameworks used in ethnic studies and to contemplate their possible value for approaching archival and recordkeeping research through an African American lens. The chapter includes a discussion on culture, what it means, how it functions, and how mankind uses it to create social power in relation to one another. It argues that the role of culture is key to understanding the interacting dynamics of race, archives, and power. The chapter also looks at how the ethnicity paradigm became the dominant racial paradigm in the United States and how dominant groups constructed race and racism as tools to strengthen and maintain power. Lastly, the chapter contemplates how conceptual frameworks from ethnic studies might be useful in archival and recordkeeping research. While there certainly also needs to be more, and more in-depth, contemplation of how multiple critical frameworks might be drawn, for example, from critical race and feminist studies, and applied together with those from ethnic studies, to examine the complexities of intersectionality (i.e., the intersections and interactions between different forms of oppression, discrimination or marginalisation that might be at work) and double marginalisation, such an in-depth discussion is outside the scope of this paper.[11] The chapter by Dunbar in this volume will provide the reader with more detail on the nature and application of relevant conceptual framings in Critical Race Theory, and the chapter by Lee provides an excellent

9 William Peterson, "Concepts of Ethnicity." In *Concepts of Ethnicity: Selections from the Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982; and Nathan Glazer, "Blacks and Ethnic Groups: The Difference, and the Political Difference it Makes," *Social Problems* 18 no.4 (1971): 444-461.

10 These definitions are an attempt to simplify a complicated discussion within the parameters of limited space.

11 For an extensive in-depth discussion on critical race theory and its relationship with continuum theory, see Chapter 12, Anthony W. Dunbar, "Prologue; Introducing Critical Race Theory to Archival Discourse: Getting the Conversation Started" (reprint from *Archival Science* 6 (2006): 109–129).

example of how multiple conceptual frameworks taken from different fields (e.g., queer theory, somatechnics) might be used within the same study.

My Standpoint

Much of my work is informed by Berger and Luckmann's notion of the social construction of reality,[12] which posits that individuals and groups interact with one another in order to create social systems that have meanings.[13] This process occurs in four stages defined by Berger and Luckmann as routinisation, institutionalisation, legitimation, and annihilation. To write this chapter, I used Berger and Luckmann's stages of reality creation to explore both the constructs and meanings of race, culture and the archive in relation to one another.

As an African American scholar who happens to be a social constructivist, I approach the archive as a sociocultural construct. By this I mean that the archive (not limited to physical places or buildings and potentially including bodily entities and intangible memory-keeping practices) is where source knowledge (regardless of whether or not it is deemed valid or reliable) is preserved for future use. Societies assign value to and employ the archive much as they do with other constructs such as race, gender and identity. As such, I believe that these entities develop subjective meanings as a result of the world in which they exist and function.[14]

Background: A Note on Race, Ethnicity and Culture

A discussion on race and ethnicity is both beneficial and necessary in a US context not because there is any significant scientific merit in either concept, but because it is the context in which the United States as a federal entity legally functioned from its origin until 1965, and even later in states such as

12 "Reality," as I use and understand it, is not indicative of something that is true or false, or right or wrong. Rather, it refers to a group's perception of what it perceives to be reality. Simply because something is perceived as "real" (or unreal) does not automatically make it so. As such, one's reality could be totally wrong and false. It is possible, therefore, for someone to be sincerely wrong.

13 For a more extended discussion of the social construction of reality, see Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality.* Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1966.

14 See, for example, Anne Gilliland and Kelvin White, "Perpetuating and Extending the Archival Paradigm: The Historical and Contemporary Roles of Professional Education and Pedagogy," *InterActions* 5 no.1 (2009), https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7wp1q908#page-3.

Louisiana. This point will become clearer later in the chapter. While there is no *biological* basis for racial distinction, however, there are *socio-historical* bases, which explains why race should be seen as unstable (this instability will also be discussed later in the chapter). This is not to suggest that because of its inherent instability race does not exist or that it should be ignored, but rather that its social meanings are constantly being changed and shaped by political struggles that vary in different contexts. Race and racial dynamics are *social* and historical processes that will vary depending on locations. For example, understandings of race in the northern and western parts of the United States during the 1930s varied significantly from those in the Deep South; and racial dynamics in the United States are not the same as they are in Latin American countries since race evolved along different trajectories and within different social (including cultural) and historical contexts.

To understand the dynamics between the concepts of culture and race better, it is first necessary to understand the concept of culture, its function, and how it is transmitted. Anthropologists commonly define culture as the complex whole that includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, values, customs, and other capabilities and habits acquired by mankind.[15] This includes social things that people do, make and think. Culture is not biological, but rather it is behavioural. Another way of defining culture is to see it as the primary tool that individuals use to pursue actions that they perceive to be in their self-interest; it is used by humanity to produce social power to achieve its goals in relation to other people and the natural environment.

Archives are cultural artefacts. Someone created them, defined their meanings, established criteria for what goes into them, and defined what role they were intended to play in society. In other words, they are created for specific purposes. What shapes and defines how records and the repositories that contain those records are manifested is culture – e.g., the prevailing set of values, customs, and knowledge – and by the same measure they are also vital in perpetuating culture. They look differently in different contexts, but all function in similar ways in that they are the repositories of what is considered important and worthy of transmitting to the next generation. An archive, therefore might be a brick and mortar building with a controlled environment, but it might equally take the form of an intangible body of

15 Leslie A. White, *The Science of Culture.* New York: Grove Press, 1949; and Pouwell Slurink, "Causes of Our Complete Dependence on Culture" in *The Ethological Roots of Culture,* R.A. Gardner, ed. Dordrecht. Boston and London: Kluwer Academic Press, 1994, p.461.

narratives, songs, dances or rituals created and performed by the community as memory and recordkeeping acts in ways that ensure and demonstrate their trustworthiness and authenticity to the community (see the chapter by Faulkhead in this volume for a discussion of the nature of Australian Indigenous narratives as family and community oral records and cultural heritage).

What shapes archival processes and concepts? Culture. What is remembered or recorded is shaped by culture. The archive's form is shaped by culture, as are the processes of creating, using, sharing and discarding records before they make it into the archive. Hence archives, together with their constituent parts, are fragments of sociocultural systems and are in constant motion – merging, splitting, diversifying and moving apart. They are not static, neutral or immutable sites of "sacred" historical knowledge. They are, rather, sites of knowledge and cultural production and re-production – places where decisions are made about whose story is worth remembering, in which ways and from which perspectives.

To help make this point clearer, the model below is a basic anatomy of culture used by anthropologist Ralph Linton who defines culture as the "configuration of learned behaviour and results of behaviour whose component elements are shared and transmitted by members of a particular society."[16]

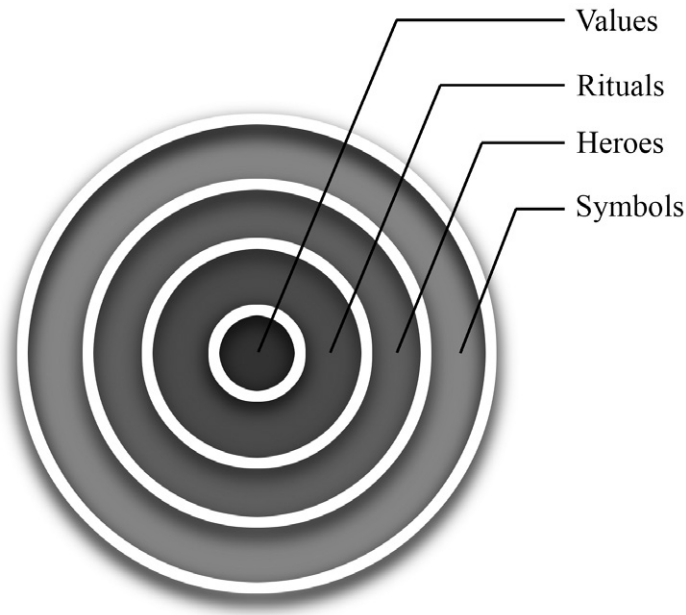
Culture is intangible; however, it is manifested through the activities of humankind – e.g., practice, whether that be professional practice, everyday life, sacred, legal system, or forms of government. From an archival perspective, the stories and heroes that are remembered or forgotten and the modes through which societies choose to do so are all manifested in some type of record, whether in oral, written, digital or kinetic form. In any case, the function and intent is to record. Culture cannot be archived, *per se*, but manifestations or evidence of culture can. The record in its various manifestations is what should be the focus of the archivist.

Figure 11.1 provides a model for visualising culture at four different levels:

- Symbols
- Heroes and heroines
- Rituals and norms
- Values

16 Ralph Linton, *The Cultural Background of Personality*. New York: Appleton-Century Crofts, 1945.

Figure 11.1. Onionskin Example of Culture[17]



Symbols represent the outermost layer of culture. Symbols refer to the objects, words, languages, gestures, and so forth that have a particular meaning for members of a culture. Heroes and heroines represent a deeper level of culture that is associated with both mythical and real men and women who epitomise certain traits that are highly esteemed or respected in a culture. Heroes and heroines are ideas of model citizens. The third layer of culture is ritual and norms. This layer is where collective activities are located (for example, ways of greeting, ceremonies commemorating life, death, or other significant events). These activities are often considered socially essential in cultures. The final and deepest level of culture is values and this level forms the core of culture. A simple definition of values is the absolute principles or standards that determine what is of worth and important in life (for example, what is good and evil, right and wrong, natural and supernatural or unnatural). As the core of culture, values permeate and influence all cultural layers, thus shaping what becomes a tangible and visual manifestation of culture. These values can be hard to recognise without a deep analysis and thorough understanding of each of these layers and their relationships with each other.

17 This model is based on the work of Geert Hofstede. See Geert Hofstede, "Culture and Organizations," *International Studies of Management & Organization* no. 4 (1980): 15-41.

The interaction between layers is influenced by core values through the realm of cultural practices. This realm should be of particular interest to the archival community because it is where recordkeeping practices, which I define as the activities that define the act of recording, take place. These practices include intent (motive), the act of creating a record (broadly defined), using it, preserving it, accessing it, and (re)-defining it. Yet this realm has been one of the most problematic for archival practice, research and education primarily because the field has done little to understand the role of cultural values (with the exception of explorations of organisational culture in business and government settings) in recordkeeping activities. Furthermore, the field has much work to do in terms of broadening understandings and raising awareness of the groups or communities whose recordkeeping practices fall outside of the traditional archival paradigm that informs so much of professional best practices and standards. With the exception of continuum thinking as conceptualised by the Australian recordkeeping field, the traditional paradigm is often disseminated as the paradigm *tout court* – the only, universal, paradigm that informs any "legitimate" form of recordkeeping (for a fuller discussion of the different paradigmatic approaches and archival traditions at work around the globe, see the chapters by Gilliland, McKemmish and Lian in this volume). One of the major objectives in socio-cultural analysis is to understand the different ways in which people use culture as a source of social power to achieve their goals in relation to other people and the natural environment.

To illustrate how culture influences recordkeeping activities in a specific context, the next section explains the culture of race and ethnicity and how these developed conceptually and practically in the United States. African American views on race and ethnicity were constructed within a specific context in response to certain parameters that were imposed by those outside the African American community. The following section is important for understanding the context of how racism (a cultural manifestation) shaped archives, their stories, and the perspective from which their stories are told.

The Culture of Race and Ethnicity in the United States

In essence, ethnic studies centres on the study of race and race dynamics from the perspective of ethnicity. As a field, it is interdisciplinary in nature and focuses on racialised people in the world. The term "racialised" is tricky, however. To help keep the concept clear, it is important to understand that

its ultimate objective and effect is to dehumanise specific groups. How this is done depends on spatial and temporal elements. For example, the basic concept of "race" as scholars think of it today (on the basis of various shades of skin colour) did not become prevalent until it was authenticated by bad "science" – i.e., pseudo-sciences such as Spencerism, anthropometry and social Darwinism. During this time, race was primarily attached to skin colour. The darker the skin, the more inferior and "non-human" one was considered. After scientific racism was debunked as a fraud, the idea of race still persisted, but skin colour was no longer a criterion for racialising a group.[18] For example, in the United States, African Americans are racialised based on skin colour, but nearly every non-black immigrant group that migrated to the United States during the 20th Century was racialised despite skin colour. This happened to Italian Americans, Irish Americans, Chinese Americans, and Mexican Americans. Native Americans were also racialised – as evidenced by the attempted ethnic genocide of Indians by early settlers.[19] Thus, these groups, many of which would not typically be considered a "race", were grouped as a race for the purpose of dehumanising them and pejoratively differentiating them from the dominant groups who exercised their power to racialise.

Likewise, many groups have been racialised outside the United States. For example, the Roma (commonly and derogatorily referred to as "gypsies") are racialised throughout much of Europe.[20] Intraracial racialisation occurred in the United Kingdom between the English and Scottish settlers and their

18 See, for example, Nancy Stephan,*'The Hour of Eugenics,' Race, Gender and Nation in Latin America.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.

19 Here, I refer to nigrescence theory, which explains one process of changing from one racial/ethnicity identity to another. For example, a "nigger" changes into "negro" who then changes into "colored" and "black." I do not think that this process is limited to African Americans. It is the author's opinion that this process has occurred in relation to nearly every major newly arrived immigrant group entering the United States in the early 20th Century. For example, during this time, Italian immigrants were primarily thought of pejoratively (as were Mexicans, Chinese, and Irish immigrants) when they began to arrive in the United States on a mass scale. Nigrescence theory was developed by William Cross and can be explored in Cross' works. See William E. Cross, "The Negro-to-Black Conversion Experience," *Black World* (1971): 13-27, and *Shades of Black: Diversity in African-American Identity*, Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1991.

20 See, for example, Belinda Cooper, "'We Have No Martin Luther King:' Eastern Europe's Roma Minority," *World Policy Journal* no. 4 (2002): 69. See also Tamara Štefanac and Kelvin L. White, "The Representation, Rights and Identity of Croatia's Roma Community: Exploring the Archival Implications," in Willer, Mirna, Anne J. Gilliland, and Marijana Tomic, eds, *Records, Archives and Memory: Selected Papers from the Conference and School on Records, Archives and Memory Studies, University of Zadar, Croatia, May 2013,* (Zadar: University of Zadar Press, 2015, in press).

descendants, and the native Irish.[21] Another example of intraracial racism is Cyprus, which has a long history of conflict between Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot citizens. In all of these cases, skin colour has little, if anything, to do with the racialisation process.[22]

Historically ethnicity, nation and class have been the three main paradigms used to study race in the United States.[23] These paradigms have particular core assumptions that serve as guides for research about the culture of race and race relations. As such, contemporary aspects of race and racial dynamics in the United States are understood by relying on those two paradigms of which ethnicity, since the last half of the 20th century, has been the most dominant and relied upon.

Ethnicity theory has its origins in 1920s America where it challenged the then prevalent ideas of social Darwinist, Spencerist, and the eugenicist thinking[24] which emanated out of England and the United States during the late 1870s as a way of scientifically explaining racial inferiority. Whites and those with light skin were considered superior to blacks and those with darker skin since it was believed that white skin was part of humanity's natural order. During this time, hereditary characteristics such as sexuality and intelligence were also associated with race. After the end of the Second World War in 1945 and the exposure of the atrocities associated with it (e.g., the genocides of Jews, Slavs and Roma), biologism took on more negative connotations and generally became seen as a pejorative construct. Furthermore, attacks against biological determinism were launched by advocates of the Progressive Era in the United States. Horace M. Kallen[25] was one such leader. He coined the concept of cultural pluralism by arguing that cultural diversity was compatible with national pride and that respect for ethnic diversity and racial difference actually strengthened the United States. He focused on the acceptance of different *immigrant-based* cultures.

Another prominent figure in the early development of the ethnicity paradigm was Robert Ezra Park. Park was an American sociologist of the

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21 See, for example, Peter Berresford Ellis, *Eyewitness to Irish History.* Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2004.

22 See, for example, Loucas Kakoulli, *The Left and the Turkish Cypriots: The Cyprus Problem from a Different Perspective*. Nicosia: Cassoulides Press, 1990.

23 For a more thorough discussion on nation and class-based paradigms, see Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States.* New York: Routledge, 1994.

24 For a more detailed discussion of racial movements such as the Eugenics Movement, see Stephan, *The Hour of Eugenics.*

25 Horace Kallen, *Cultural Pluralism and the American Idea: An Essay in Social Philosophy.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1956.

"Chicago School" who is noted for developing the theory of assimilation which became a major current in the ethnicity paradigm. This theory divided racial dynamics between incoming immigrants to the United States and the dominant (existing) race into 4 distinct stages: contact, conflict, accommodation and assimilation. Initial contact occurs when immigrants are first introduced to the mainstream culture. Conflict caused by competition for resources (for example, employment, socioeconomic status and education) follows contact. Once this occurs, a hierarchical relationship forms between the immigrant group and the existing dominant group through which one group is dominated. The last stage of the cycle is when the immigrant group becomes fully assimilated into the dominant culture. Park based his theory of assimilation on 4 assumptions:

> Racial/ethnic groups are not central or persistent elements of modern societies;
>
> Racism and racial oppression are caused by other things such as economics and psychology;
>
> The most important aspects of racism are rooted in American attitudes and prejudices; and
>
> Immigrants from the developing world are essentially the same as white European ethnic groups. In other words, racial minorities of the 3rd world will assimilate just as easily as those white European ethnic groups did. This is often referred to as the "immigrant analogy."[26]

Hence, both Kallen's and Park's perspectives were based on a conceptual model of white immigrants who had come to the United States from across the Atlantic ocean that did not consider immigrant groups from other parts of the world, descendants of former slaves brought to the United States by force, or peoples indigenous to these lands who were identified as racial minorities such as Asian Americans, Latin Americans, African Americans and Native Americans. This omission is significant because it became the main reason why, during the 1970s and 1980s, ethnicity theory was challenged by class and nation-based conceptualisations of race. These challenges were initiated by black and other minority movements primarily because they rejected the following underlying assumptions:

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26 Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 16-20.

> The United States was committed to racial equality (this was challenged especially because the country had used race as the central axis of social organisation since it came into existence);
>
> Ethnic groups of colour could be assimilated into American life in the same ways that white ethnic groups had been in the past (Park's assumption #4); and (probably most significant)
>
> Racial minorities desired to assimilate (there was voluminous evidence of enclaves of minority groups who maintained their own identities, values and cultures and did not aspire to become anglicised).[27]

Omi and Winant, describing the United States as a racial dictatorship, emphasise that the United States is far from being a colour-blind society and that race has been at the very core of the United States' development:

> From the very inception of the Republic [United States] to the present moment, race has been a profound determinant of one's political rights, one's location in the labor market, and indeed one's sense of "identity". The hallmark of this history has been *racism*, not the abstract ethos of equality, and while racial minority groups have been treated differently, all can bear witness to the tragic consequences of racial oppression. The U.S. has confronted each racially defined minority with a unique form of despotism and degradation. The examples are familiar: Native Americans faced genocide, blacks were subjected to racial slavery, Mexicans were invaded and colonized, and Asians faced exclusion.[28]

They continue:

> For most of its existence both as European colony and as an independent nation, the U.S. was a *racial dictatorship*. From 1607 to 1865 – 258 years – most non-whites were firmly eliminated from the spheres of politics. After the Civil War there was the brief egalitarian experiment of Reconstruction which terminated ignominiously in 1877. In its wake followed almost a century of legally sanctioned segregation and denial of the vote, nearly absolute in the South and much of the Southwest, less effective in the North and far West, but formidable in any case. These barriers fell only in the mid-1960s, a mere quarter century ago … Patterns of racial inequality have proven, unfortunately to be quite

27 For more examples, see Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States,* 21.

28 Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 1.

> stubborn and persistent … *It is important, therefore, to recognize that in many respects, racial dictatorship is the norm against which all U.S. politics must be measured* [emphasis added].[29]

The key here in the development of ethnic conceptual frameworks is that race and racial dynamics needed to be addressed because they were the very fibre of how the United States organised members of its society; race (as opposed to the individual) determined almost everything. Race and racism had systematically permeated nearly, if not all, of America's institutions, including education, marriage, law, religion, history, science, sports and the arts. One of the general weaknesses of ethnicity theory at the time is that it did not effectively address the institutional and ideological nature of race in America. As a result, ethnicity theory found itself under increasing attack from many blacks and other racial minority groups who demanded more emphasis on group rights and recognition. During the 1970s and 1980s, therefore, ethnicity theorists had to reformulate their ideas, which led to neo-conservatism – championing individual over group rights and emphasising the danger of state activities that promoted anti-discrimination policies. Hence, they argued, the state should be colour-blind. Despite subsequent challenges and reformulations of ethnicity theory, this paradigm has dominated and shaped academic thinking well into contemporary times.

The nation-based paradigm, coming into fruition in the mid-1960s,[30] might appear on the surface to be the most radical of the three racial paradigms. Its proponents, growing weary of the call for moderate, nonviolent integration, demanded that the colonisers allow all members of those "colonised" through subjugation (racially oppressed peoples who were generally *forced* to enter into the United States) to be nationally liberated for the purpose of developing their own cultural autonomy and deracinating colonialism in order to restructure society along non-racial lines. Hence, the nation-based paradigm has its roots in capitalism as colonialism (unlike previous imperial systems that were not phenomena that operated globally, but rather were geographically determined) and argues that Europe carved up the world's existing nations and territories primarily for economic reasons

29 Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 65-66.

30 Its antecedents date back as early as the 1920s with contributions from civil rights activists such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, George Padmore, Malcolm X, Nkrhumah, Franz Fanon, and others. For a broader discussion on the nation-based paradigm see Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*.

and assigned to each one power, privilege, misery and exploitation according to the needs and desires of Europe's ruling powers. Assignments were usually made along racial distinctions in order to maintain colonial dominance. The nation-based approach emphasised a broader range of racial oppression – political, cultural, economic, spatial segregation, and so forth – than did the ethnicity and class-based paradigms.

Cultural Worlds, Ethnic Studies, and Archival and Recordkeeping Research

How does the previous discussion fit in with archival and recordkeeping research? I posit that archival and recordkeeping research, if approached through an ethnic studies lens, can shed a brighter light on more detailed, "hidden" parts of society that otherwise would be missed or purposively forgotten. A key space in which culture (symbols, heroes, rituals, and values), race and ethnicity intersect is that of recordkeeping and archival practices. Pederson reminds the archival community that humans are "the only species on earth that systematically documents its thoughts and activities by making and keeping records."[31] Other scholars have demonstrated that although all humans create some form of records, it is usually the records of those with the need, capability, and power to preserve them that find their way into the official archive, and that much of what comprises contemporary archival theory – for example, conceptualisations of the record, evidence, ownership, appraisal, authenticity, *respect des fonds* and so forth – has been developed to support bureaucratic, administrative and commercial activities in order to sustain and perpetuate those types of institutions and environments from their particular perspectives.[32]

Since the 1970s, there have been increasing calls within the archival community to take a wider, more nuanced and more systematic interest in the socio-cultural aspects of archival practice. Key examples of approaches that became prominent in the discourse of the 1980s and 1990s are the so-called "documentation strategy,"[33] and the Canadian concept of the total archive, both of which emphasised collecting a wider range of materials

31 McKemmish et al., "Professing Archives," 51.

32 See Gilliland and White, "Perpetuating and Extending the Archival Paradigm."

33 See Elizabeth Snowden Johnson for a recent reflection: "Our Archives, Our Selves: Documentation Strategy and the Re-appraisal of Professional Identity," *American Archivist* 71 (Spring/Summer 2008): 190–202.

including maps and other forms of documentary materials.[34] By the start of the twenty-first century, a discernable movement toward self-documenting by identity-based communities (a.k.a. *archives from the bottom up*; *grassroots archives*; *community-centred archives*; *oppositional archives*) who felt themselves to be excluded from, misrepresented in, or oppressed or marginalised by records and archives, began to gain the attention of the archival field.[35]

Over the past decade, a growing cadre of archival scholars and educators have not only questioned and challenged contemporary and traditional archival theory and practice, but have also begun to address other socio-cultural dynamics of the archival discourse and to build infrastructures that support alternate epistemologies and recordkeeping activities. For example researchers at Monash University collaborated with practitioners and Koorie community members to develop and implement an information system that was sensitive to the archival needs of Indigenous communities.[36] Other examples include collaborative studies undertaken by Gilliland and McKemmish on the conditions and circumstances of archival education in Pacific Rim countries.[37] Data from these studies indicated that both archival educators and professionals were not educated or being educated to address the ways of remembering that are traditional in ethnic or Indigenous communities and that archival education curricula tend to highlight national, political and enterprise priorities and internationally-developed best practices. Emergent pluralistic archival education plays

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34 See Laura Millar, "Discharging our Debt: The Evolution of the Total Archives Concept in English Canada," *Archivaria* 46 (1998): 104-146.

35 See Jeannette A. Bastian and Ben Alexander, eds. *Community Archives: The Shaping of Memory* (London: Facet, 2009); Andrew Flinn, "Archival Activism: Independent and Community-led Archives, Radical Public History and the Heritage Professions," *InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies* 7 no.2 (2011), http://escholarship.org/uc/item/9pt2490x; and Anne J. Gilliland and Andrew Flinn, "Community Archives: What are We Really Talking About?" Keynote address, *Nexus, Confluence, and Difference: Community Archives Meets Community Informatics: Prato CIRN Conference Oct 28-30 2013*, Larry Stillman, Amalia Sabiescu, Nemanja Memarovic, eds. Centre for Community Networking Research, Centre for Social Informatics, Monash University, 2013. ISBN 978-0–9874652-1-4, http://www.ccnr.infotech.monash.edu.au/assets/docs/prato2013_papers/gilliland_flinn_keynote.pdf.

36 See Fiona Ross, Sue McKemmish, and Shannon Faulkhead, "Indigenous Knowledge and the Archives: Designing Trusted Archival Systems for Koorie Communities," *Archives and Manuscripts* 34 no.2 (November 2006): 112-151.

37 Anne Gilliland, Andrew Lau, Yang Lu, Sue McKemmish, Shilpa Rele, and Kelvin White, "Pluralizing the Archival Paradigm: Critical Discussions Around the Pacific Rim," *Archives & Manuscripts* 35 no. 2 (November 2007): 10, and Anne Gilliland, Sue McKemmish, Zhang Bin, Kelvin White, Yang Lu, and Andrew Lau, "Pluralizing the Archival Paradigm: Can Archival Education in Pacific Rim Communities Address the Challenge?" *American Archivist* 71 no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2008): 87.

a significant role in developing a more diverse pool of archival practitioners and future educators who are able to respond to the information needs of various ethnic communities in culturally sensitive ways.[38] The archival education program at the University of Oklahoma is an exemplar in that it emphasises and prepares students to be both socio-culturally aware and sensitive to diverse recordkeeping environments and activities, and the implications these have for marginalised or underrepresented communities. This is done by introducing students to archival concepts as they apply across three communicative modes (i.e., orality, literacy, and digitality) in their first archives class and ensuring that concept-based teaching that is centred on these communicative modes is integrated throughout the archival curriculum. Assignments require students to apply these concepts to both mainstream and under-represented communities. This has proven to be one effective way of cultivating cultural sensitivity in students.

While the archival field has made some progress towards making archives more relevant to society, there is still much work to be done, especially in the area of race and racial dynamics. It is in this vein that ethnic studies frameworks may be useful to recordkeeping, archival research and practice. The problem is twofold, and in order to illustrate the problem, it is necessary to understand how humanity has organised itself over time and how archival theory has adapted to mankind's self-organisation.

According to American anthropologist John Bodley, there are three worlds in which cultures operate: the tribal, imperial, and the commercial.[39] Within these worlds, since culture is not static, I posit the existence of multiple cultural spheres within which culture is created, manifested, preserved, transformed, transmitted and diminished. Bodley uses basic concepts of cultural anthropology and a culture-scale perspective to compare cultures of increasing scales as he focuses on universal human concerns. He is primarily concerned with how people use culture to get what they want in relation to other people (i.e., how do they create and organise social power). His categories

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38 See the Archival Education and Research Institute (AERI) Pluralizing the Archival Curriculum Group (PACG), "Educating for the Archival Multiverse," *American Archivist* (Spring/Summer 2011): 68-102; Anne Gilliland, "Neutrality, Social Justice and the Obligations of Archival Educators and Education in the Twenty-first Century," *Archival Science* 11 nos. 3-4 (2011): 193-209, and "Pluralizing Archival Education: A Non-Zero-Sum Proposition," Chapter 10 in *Through the Archival Looking Glass: A Reader on Diversity and Inclusion*, Mary Caldera and Kathy Neal, eds. (Chicago, IL: Society of American Archivists, 2014): 231-268.

39 John H. Bodley, *Cultural Anthropology: Tribes, States and the Global System*, 5th ed. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011, p. 11.

are based on the history of mankind's population growth. Early humans organised themselves in small groups – tribes – and there was no need of large, bureaucratic governments, as we know them today. Everyone in the tribe was guaranteed access to everything needed (e.g., food, land, and sociocultural knowledge) to sustain life and *be* human. As the world's population grew, humans began to organise themselves into chiefdoms and states. Bodley refers to this as the imperial world. Increased populations led to increased competition for limited resources. As the global population grew and natural resources became increasingly limited, humanity began organising itself into modern nation-state governments. He calls this sphere the commercial world.

What is culture's role, according to Bodley? He states: "people are unique animals in our almost total reliance on culture as our primary means of survival. Culture is socially transmitted information that shapes our behavior" [emphasis his].[40] Thus, culture plays a fundamental role in creating social power for survival purposes and for passing this knowledge to direct offspring. Examining the main cultural processes occurring in each sphere illustrates this. According to Bodley, humanisation is the main cultural process occurring in the tribal world (see Figure 11.2). It is also the most crucial because, according to him, it is "centered on the household and involves the maintenance and reproduction of individual humans, human society, and human culture."[41] Humanisation is defined as the "production, maintenance, and reproduction of human beings and culture;"[42] politicisation, which is defined as the "production and maintenance of centralized political power by co-opting the humanization process."[43] This is the primary cultural process occurring in the imperial world. Lastly, there is the commercial world in which commercialisation is the primary cultural process. He defines commercialisation as the "production and maintenance of private profit-making business enterprise as the means of accumulating capital, by co-opting the humanization and politicisation processes."[44] What is striking here is the collective and gradual drive to increase social power for a particular group at another group's expense, and the major processes – namely politicisation and commercialisation – are used to co-opt the most crucial process – the humanisation process! Dehumanisation (racialisation is only one of many ways to dehumanise someone) plays a fundamental role in this process.

40 Bodley, *Cultural Anthropology*, 10.
41 Bodley, *Cultural Anthropology*, 21.
42 Bodley, *Cultural Anthropology*, 11.
43 Bodley, *Cultural Anthropology*, 10.
44 Bodley, *Cultural Anthropology*, 11.

Figure 11.2. Bodley's Cultural Processes and Subprocesses by Cultural World[45]

Tribal World
Major cultural process • Humanisation: the production, maintenance, and reproduction of human beings and culture Subprocesses • Conceptualisation: producing abstract concepts and symbols that shape behaviour • Materialisation: giving physical form to concepts • Verbalisation: producing speech • Socialisation: producing human societies by exogamy • Cultural Transmission: reproducing culture
Imperial World
Major cultural process • Politicisation: the production and maintenance of centralised political power by attempting to co-opt the humanisation process Subprocesses • Taxation: extracting surplus production to support government • Conquest: extracting booty, slaves, and tribute • Specialisation: government employment • Militarisation: development of professional military • Bureaucratisation: hierarchical command structure • Urbanisation: development of cities
Commercial World
Major cultural process • Commercialisation: the production and maintenance of private profit-making business enterprise as a means of accumulating capital, by attempting to co-opt the humanisation and politicisation process Subprocesses • Commodification: market for land, labour, money, basic goods and services • Industrialisation: mass production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services • Capitalisation: ownership of means of production separated from labour • Corporatisation: business enterprise becomes suprahuman • Externalisation: cost of commercial growth are socialised • Supralocalisation: business enterprise is detached from community • Financialisation: finance institutionalised, separated from production

What roles do the archive and the archivist play in this process? The archivist is the processor and the archives are the "vaults" (broadly defined to be sensitive to the various modalities and forms in which they exist) in which selected elements of each process are preserved for the sake of maintaining culture as well as remembering it. This is telling in the Phipps case where race was recorded by parts of society that benefitted from doing so. Those in power (i.e., whites) recorded race to fix and perpetuate the dehumanisation

45 To see the original table, see Bodley, *Cultural Anthropology*, 11.

of non-whites – not only through their decisions about what to record, but also through the development of the rules by which the record was created and could be changed. As such, archives become tools for the creation and maintenance of social power until change occurs outside the archive.

It is important to point out that most contemporary archival theory and practice developed in and in response to bureaucratic recordkeeping practices (located in the cultural sphere of politicisation in Figure 11.2). As more commercialisation – an offshoot of politicisation – occurs, such theory and practices slowly adapts to the archival needs located within the cultural spheres of politicisation and commercialisation, but still at a much faster pace than it addresses the archival needs located in the sphere of humanisation. Thus, contemporary theory is more responsive to records predominantly created and used in the sphere of politicisation and commercialisation.

Figure 11.3: Archival Processes and Subprocesses

Realm of archival activity

- Record creation and recordkeeping practices:
  - What, why, and how records were created, represented, used, and trusted?
  - What, why, and how were records transmitted for cultural knowledge and record- and memory-keeping purposes across time and cultures?
- Evidence of major and subprocesses captured by and/or about a specific ethnic/racial group
- Traces of racial dynamics between groups

From the archival perspective, the realm of creating and maintaining records is where one would find evidence of the major processes and subprocesses. For each of Bodley's worlds, one could ask how each of the processes are captured and become part of the records multiverse. The above framework (see Figure 11.3) could be useful in elucidating the obscure, yet rich realm of recordkeeping and archival activities that, when collectively examined, more deeply explains not only society's cultural values, but also the rationale, purpose and meanings behind its activities.

The key thing to understand is that such evidence is defined, interpreted, and understood by the cultural group producing the evidence rather than by an outsider. Bates' notion of the pervasiveness of information is also applicable to archives and their content.[46] All societies document, but not all groups within a society document in the same way because culture, history, politics, economics, race, gender, class, and so forth influence recordkeeping activities.

46 Marcia J. Bates, "The Invisible Substrate of Information Science," *Journal of the American Society for Information Science,*50 no. 12 (October 1999): 1043.

These spheres are not exhaustive, but they can serve as examples that should be of particular importance to the archival community because they are where recordkeeping and archival practices are located. By not acknowledging the multiplicity of cultural spheres and the recordkeeping and archival activity that exists in each sphere, archival theory and practice continue to function as hegemonic tools that facilitate the reproduction of dominant culture.[47]

An example that illustrates this point is the concept of archival appraisal. In 1999, archival scholar Terry Cook spoke at the University of Maryland.[48] In his presentation, he defines appraisal theory as the "concepts that determine 'value' and enunciates the generic attributes of those concepts that apply to the selection of records for enduring preservation." He states:

> Appraisal imposes a heavy social responsibility on archivists. In the stirring words of Pam Wernich, a South African archivist writing in 1988, archivists are doing nothing less than "moulding the future of our documentary heritage." Archivists determine "which elements of social life are imparted to future generations …" As a profession, we archivists need to realize continually the gravity of this task … We are deciding what is remembered and what is forgotten, who in society is visible and who remains invisible, who has a voice and who does not … In many societies … certain classes, regions, ethnic groups, or races, women as a gender and non-heterosexual people, have been de-legitimized by their relative or absolute exclusion from archives, and thus from history and mythology – sometimes unconsciously and carelessly, sometimes consciously and deliberately. Why?

To answer Cook's question, it is useful to situate archival appraisal in a racial, political, historical context. Thus, a better way for archivists undertaking appraisal to phrase Cook's question might be "*Whose* knowledge is most worthy?" instead of "*what* knowledge is most worthy?" The decision to

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47 See, for example, Society of American Archivists, "*A* Census"; Kelvin L. White and Anne J. Gilliland, "Promoting Reflexivity and Inclusivity in Archival Education, Research and Practice," *Library Quarterly* 80 no.3 (July 2010): 231-248; Gilliland et al., "Pluralizing the Archival Paradigm: Critical Discussions Around the Pacific Rim," 10; Gilliland et al., "Pluralizing the Archival Paradigm: Can Archival Education in Pacific Rim Communities Address the Challenge?" 87; and Gilliland and White, "Perpetuating and Extending the Archival Paradigm."

48 Terry Cook, "Archival Appraisal and Collection: Issues, Challenges, New Approaches," Special Lecture Series at the University of Maryland and to NARA Staff, College Park, MD, April 1999. http://www.mybestdocs.com/cookt-nara-990421-2.htm.

define one group's knowledge, culture and history as worthwhile to pass along to others while those of others are erased from the historical record says something about who has power in society. What many archivists fail to reflect upon is that during the process of appraisal, it is in their attempts to be impartial in preserving what is believed to have most value for society, that they perpetuate and privilege the values of the dominant group.

Underlying these issues is a particular set of questions: What is the relationship between archival functions such as appraisal and knowledge production? What roles do ideology and hegemony play in this relationship? What is the relationship between the archive and knowledge production? What type of knowledge is produced? Whose knowledge is reproduced? As already noted, race remains a hegemonic force in American society (and it will be for some time to come). It is hegemonic in the sense that it's truly total, as the Phipps example illustrated. In her case, race and racism, which are sociocultural constructs, dictated codifications of race as well as its immutability once recorded, regardless of one's phenotype. Williams provides an excellent summary of the Gramscian concept of hegemony. He states:

> For hegemony supposes the existence of something which is truly total, which is not merely secondary or superstructural, like the weak sense of ideology, but which is lived at such a depth, which saturates the society to such an extent [that it] … even constitutes the limit of common sense for most people under its sway … corresponds to the reality of social experience very much more clearly than any notions derived from the formula of base and superstructure. For if ideology were merely some abstract imposed notion, if our social and political and cultural ideas and assumptions and habits were merely the result of specific manipulations, … [or] a kind of overt training which might be simply ended or withdrawn, then society would be very much easier to move and to change than in practice … . This notion of hegemony … emphasizes the facts of domination.[49]

Williams' statement shows how hegemony acts to saturate society's very consciousness so that the educational, professional, and social world within which society interacts, along with interpretations placed on its actions,

49 R. Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory." In *Schooling and Capitalism,* Roger Dale, Geoff Esland, and Madeleine MacDonald, eds. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul with Open University Press, 1976, p.202.

becomes the only world. Thus, information institutions such as archives could be viewed as one of the main agencies that transmit dominant culture. Williams also describes a process that he refers to as the "selective tradition," which he defines as:

> that which, within the terms of an effective dominant culture, is always passed off as 'the tradition,' *the* significant past. But always the selectivity is the point; the way in which from a whole possible area of past and present, certain meanings and practices are chosen for emphasis, certain other meanings and practices are neglected and excluded.[50]

For the archivist, archival appraisal is the space in which the selective tradition is manifest.

The second part of the problem is related to local socio-historical contexts: if one does not understand race and its dynamics in its local context, then one cannot fully understand American history and its records universe. An ethnic studies framework serves as a lens through which one can examine and understand racial phenomena and the records associated with them. Like culture, race is not tangible. However, manifestations or evidence of race and racial conceptualisations exist in the record. The argument is not that there is a scarcity of historical records about racial experiences, but rather that the records that exist are usually one-sided in that they were created by and from the perspectives of the dominant group and rarely by or from the perspectives of the subjects themselves. For example, when the origins and formation of the African American community in the United States is examined, slave records, which primarily function as evidence of commercial and legal transactions, are referenced. From a plantation's birth registers, historians have been able to piece together an interpretation of the social and cultural practices of slaves living on the South Carolina Good Hope plantation.[51] The first recorded birth in the register occurred in Africa in 1760. The last birth recorded was in 1857 – 97 years later. The register included over 200 slaves and covered some of the most formative years of the African American experience. However, its history was recorded by the plantation whites who recorded slave births for the purpose of keeping an accurate inventory of the slave owner's property. Little evidence has been found that sheds light on the social life of slaves from the slave's perspective. This does not mean that slaves did not document their

50 Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory," 203.

51 John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South.* Revised and enlarged edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 1979, p.174.

life on the plantation, but rather that they created different types of records for different reasons. One such record is the slave spiritual. The slave song functions as a counternarrative to the official plantation record, since these songs originated from the slave community. The use of spirituals, Blassingame argues, shows that preliterate, pre-modern Africans:

> were so imperfectly acculturated into the secular American society into which they were thrust … that they were forced to fall back upon the only cultural frames of reference that made any sense to them and gave them a feeling of security … the slaves' oral tradition …[52]

The spiritual functioned as a record of a people who found through it the status, harmony, and values they needed in order for them and their offspring to survive life during enslavement. Furthermore, what if communities were limited in their ways of communicating at a mass scale, both among themselves and among others, and found it more effective to do so through a medium that the dominant culture deemed insignificant and transitory? From this perspective, could a song be considered part of the historical record since it functioned as an alternative source of evidence of social, cultural, political and identity discourses that not only sought to provide entertainment, but also presented nonjudgmental prescriptions and blueprints for what life should and could be like for a particular community?

The black press is another example of how a subaltern community documented and provided commentary on culture in the United States, particularly during the first half of the twentieth-century. During the 1930s and 40s, the black press served a unique role not only for the African American community, but also for the nation in terms of redefining class, race and nationhood. It also played a significant role in resetting the terms of public conversation. The difficulties African American writers experienced in getting published forced them to work creatively to broadcast their ideas in a variety of formats. Writers who wanted to address their position in society had to provide information that made sense of a country torn by economic and social systems. Editors had to find fresh ways to address sensitive issues like discrimination, economic policy, and racial and gender roles. Therefore, it is not uncommon to see writers forming and reforming ideologies, creating and recreating a public sphere, and crafting and re-crafting nationhood through formats such as narratives, photographs, poetry, jeremiads, and comic strips. Although each format proved equally important and sufficient as creative

52 Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, 176.

negotiations, they were also a means through which proposals for alternative paths were presented to the nation.[53]

The previous examples show that what might be significant to a subculture might be insignificant to the dominant culture. What happens when the medium of the record itself does not fit the generally accepted definition of a record, as defined by the mainstream? Frameworks drawn from ethnic studies can shed light on such issues and provide space to examine how records functioned within their socio-historical contexts. Whether the mode of records creation was through narrative, poem, songs or comic strips, it nevertheless amounted to exchanges between community members over crucial questions, roles and expectations. These exchanges dealt with issues that had deep, long lasting effects on the African American community and actively created positive change. In these instances, these modes of communication became evidence of social acts. Furthermore, in a society in which African American writers/artists struggled to get anything into print, how might the particular forms in which they wrote have an affect upon understandings of a record?

Conclusion

This chapter raises questions about the nature of creating and keeping records in various societal contexts. It argues that culture plays a significant role in documenting the processes of humanisation, politicisation, and commercialisation. In other words, skin colour does nothing in a real sense unless something else informs one how to interpret skin colour or ethnicity. Culture is what shapes one's meaning of skin colour, not vice versa. Furthermore, the chapter uses the development of racial culture in the United States to show how societal power is created by one group in order to dominate other groups by dehumanising them. It illustrates how this process is captured and supported by recordkeeping and archiving activities, not only by decision-making about what becomes the archival record, but also by constructing the rules of archivy and the criteria for which materials can be legitimately considered worthy of being preserved. The chapter uses the Phipps case as an illustration not only of the implications of racism on the lived experiences of those affected by it, but also of how the values of

53 For more discussion on the role of the Black Press, see Lee Finkle, *Forum for Protest: The Black Press During World War II.* Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1975; and Todd Vogel, ed., *The Black Press: New Literary and Historical Essays.* New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001.

a racialised society, implicate records and recordkeeping, in an African American context. The extent to which the values exhibited by the records resonate with the value judgment brought to bear during the archival appraisal process has tremendous implications for the role and conduct of archival appraisal and indeed, all subsequent archival activities with those records. Finally, the chapter shows that the very nature of recordkeeping and archiving speaks volumes about what a society values and with whom it is competing for the goal of survival. This is the driving force behind recordkeeping, archiving, and the rules associated with such activities.

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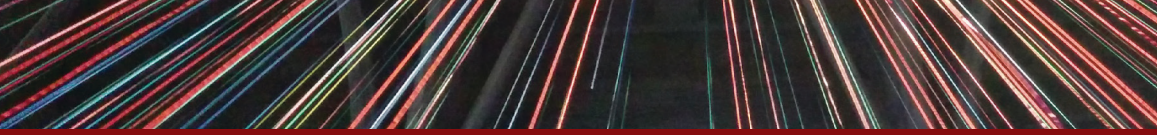

Research in the Archival Multiverse

Edited by Anne J Gilliland, Sue McKemmish and Andrew J Lau

Within the past 15 years, the field of archival studies around the world has experienced unprecedented growth, both within the academy and the profession, and archival studies graduate education programs today have among the highest enrolments in any information field. During the same period, there has also been unparalleled expansion and innovation in the diversity of methods and theories being applied in archival scholarship. Global in scope, *Research in the Archival Multiverse* compiles critical and reflective essays across a wide range of emerging research areas and interests in archival studies with the aim of providing current and future archival academics with a text addressing possible methods and theoretical frameworks that have been and might be used in archival scholarship. More than a collation of research methods for handy reference, this volume advocates for reflexive research practice as a means by which to lay bare the fuzziness and messiness of research. Whereas research in the form of published research papers and juried conference presentations provides a view of the study framed in terms of research questions and findings, reflexive research practice reveals the context of the study and chains of situations, choices, and decisions that influence the trajectories of the studies themselves. Such elucidations from the position of the researcher are instructive for others, who may be inspired to apply or adapt the method for their own research.

Anne J Gilliland is Professor and Director, Archival Studies specialisation, Department of Information Studies, and Director, Center for Information as Evidence, Graduate School of Education & Information Studies, University of California Los Angeles (UCLA).

Sue McKemmish is Chair of Archival Systems and Director, Centre for Organisational and Social Informatics, Monash University.

Andrew J Lau is Program Director for Instructional Content Development, UCLA Extension, and Lecturer, the University of Maryland College of Information Studies.

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